

System Configuration Team (SCT)

Meeting Notes April 23, 2004

Greetings and Introductions.

The April 23 meeting of the System Configuration Team was held at the National Marine Fisheries Service offices in Portland, Oregon. The meeting was chaired by Bill Hevlin of NMFS. The agenda and a list of attendees for the meeting are attached as Enclosures A and B. Silverberg led a round of introductions and a review of the agenda.

The following is a distillation (not a verbatim transcript) of items discussed at the meeting, together with actions taken on those items. Please note that some enclosures referenced may be too lengthy to routinely include with the meeting notes; copies of all enclosures referred to in the minutes are available upon request from Kathy Ceballos of NMFS at 503/230-5420.

2. Update on Spring Operations and Studies Underway.

Hevlin noted that there is some confusion surrounding this topic, because decisions have been made at various levels. Marvin Shuttters said TMT has been discussing the low river flows/spill/transport issue in the Lower Snake. He said his understanding is that spill will occur until 6 a.m. tomorrow morning at Lower Granite and Little Goose. The BGS in/out study at Lower Granite was scheduled to begin two days ago, but is essentially stalled for 2004, and will be picked up next year. Hydroacoustic data is being collected, and we should have about 10 days of hydroacoustic data from 2004, Shuttters said.

At Lower Monumental, he continued, spill not related to research is scheduled to begin either tomorrow or Saturday from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. until April 30, when fish releases will begin for the passage and survival study, at which point spill will go to 24 hours a day. Fish will be released daily for 13 days; we will be using the spill pattern developed at WES, with no gate opening smaller than five feet, Shuttters explained. We were not able to get spill for a long enough period to study bulk spill vs. BiOp spill, he said, so after the 13 days of bulk spill, spill will stop at Lower Monumental. We will then release fish with no spill for another 12 days, said

Shutters. Ron Boyce noted that the salmon managers submitted an SOR yesterday, requesting that spill continue at Lower Granite and Little Goose until steelhead predominate for three consecutive days – they have not yet begun to do so -- and recognizing the spill for the Lower Monumental study.

Moving on to Ice Harbor, Shutters said the spill survival study is intact – no changes in operation are planned, and spill will go forward, alternating between two treatments in both spring and summer. That study will end approximately July 10. The McNary test will also go forward as planned; the McNary modernization test of new VBS designs is underway, as is the radio-telemetry study. The SOR to maintain operations of the full McNary powerhouse (excluding the four test units) within 1% has been accepted by TMT, Shutters added – in other words, the non-test units will operate within 1% this year.

The group discussed concerns about the unusual patterns of descaling and eye injuries that have been observed when the McNary test units are operated outside 1%, the group's desire to closely watch the McNary smolt monitoring data this spring and ways to coordinate the distribution of smolt monitoring data in a timely fashion. Shutters said his office will send out the weekly descaling and injury report, as well as PIT-tag data, directly to the salmon managers each Monday morning. If the smolt monitoring crew sees something catastrophic, added Hevlin, we'll get a response going right away and shut down the test. It was so agreed.

Rock Peters said that, at The Dalles, the first round of High-Z testing is being completed this week, and the results are encouraging so far. The second week of the test is being delayed until the runoff peaks. We're anticipating radio-tracking and hydroacoustic releases at that project next week, said Peters; we're ready to go, and the spill wall is now completed. At Bonneville, hydroacoustics is up and running and radio-tag releases will take place next week, he added.

The group briefly discussed the potential impacts of the proposed changes to the summer spill program on Lower Columbia research projects; Peters said the Corps is still moving forward on the assumption that there will be a summer spill program this year. That decision rests with the executives, he said; in the meantime, we are prepared to conduct the two-treatment test at Bonneville this summer.

Steve Rainey also discussed results from the Ice Harbor balloon-tag study, which concluded in March. He noted that, while there are injury concerns associated with this work, there are no plans to truncate the study at this time.

3. Update on FFRDWG Actions or Information.

Peters said the next Portland District FFRDWG meeting is May 13, in the sixth-floor Forest Service meeting room. He said there are some actions underway to look at new surface collection technologies in the lower river. The Oregon Legislature is planning to take some

actions on this issue next week, said Peters; FFDRWG will be discussing surface collection options at its May 13 meeting. Everything else is going well, Peters said.

Shutters said the next Walla Walla District FFDRWG meeting is scheduled for May 19-20.

4. Review of Technical Considerations and the Recommendation for the Next RSW Site.

This is a continuation of a previous SCT discussion, said Hevlin; we agreed that FFDRWG would develop technical considerations for Lower Monumental and Little Goose – the benefits of putting an RSW at those two sites. FFDRWG was hopefully going to develop a consensus on that issue, Hevlin said. We also discussed the possibility of looking at John Day and McNary as possible RSW sites, he added.

Shutters said FFDRWG had requested input from the various FFDRWG and SCT participants; there was a conference call on April 5 to discuss those comments, which was quite well-attended. At the end of that meeting, we agreed that the Corps would take the input received at and after that conference call and put it the form of a written analysis of the pertinent data, which would lead to a recommendation from Walla Walla District as to which site would derive the greatest biological benefit. We have not yet produced that analysis, said Shutters; however, basically where we're leaning is toward Lower Monumental, in terms of the best system survival for Snake River fish.

The group devoted a few minutes of discussion to the Corps' conclusion, and the data on which it is based; Boyce noted that ODFW and other salmon managers do not necessarily agree with the Corps' interpretation of that data. Shutters said that, at this point, the Corps is open to designating Little Goose – or, possibly, a project like McNary or John Day, as the next project to receive an RSW, if that is the SCT's recommendation. Ultimately, it was agreed that Walla Walla District will develop the data analysis/decision document promised at the conference call and will present it as a strawman for discussion. Rainey noted that there is some pressure to make a decision on this issue; we can't continue to defer this decision, he said. Shutters reiterated that the Corps is proceeding with design work for the Lower Monumental RSW, so the infrastructure will be in place for a 2007 installation. In response to a question, Shutters said Walla Walla District should be able to develop an informal decision document on this issue by next week.

The group devoted an extensive discussion to the question of how best to come to grips with this issue, including the possibility of designing the Lower Monumental and Little Goose RSWs on a parallel track. However, the Corps indicated that funds are not currently available to model both projects. There was general agreement that it would make sense to build on Walla Walla District's analysis of the biological benefits of RSW installation at Little Goose and Lower Monumental to include other projects, including McNary and John Day.

Hevlin summed up this discussion by saying that, unless the SCT develops a different consensus recommendation, the Corps will continue to move forward with design work for the

Lower Monumental RSW, and design of the Little Goose RSW will start once the new fiscal year begins in October. Is there a consensus that we should redirect the modeling effort toward Little Goose, rather than Lower Monumental? Hevlin asked. No, Boyce replied – we need that expanded biological decision document before we can make an informed decision. Shuttles said it would be possible for Walla Walla District to produce the Little Goose/Lower Monumental analysis by next week, but it will not be possible to include McNary and John Day in that analysis by next week. Just so we're clear, said Hevlin, the lack of SCT consensus means that the Corps will continue design work on the Lower Monumental RSW.

The group continued to discuss the potential biological and economic benefits of Lower Monumental vs. Little Goose RSW construction. Boyce observed that, in Oregon's view, RSWs need to be installed at all feasible projects by the end of the decade. Woodin noted that there is a difference in scale at McNary and John Day; it may be possible that six RSWs, rather than one, will be needed at those two projects, which is something that hasn't really been discussed yet. Boyce observed that a defensible, technically-sound program is needed, because the RSW question is so politically-charged. Kranda observed that such a process will necessarily be long and complex. It was agreed that further analysis is needed, particularly at McNary.

To sum up, said Hevlin, Marvin will provide the SCT the decision analysis as soon as it's available; if it is available soon, he said he will schedule a conference call to discuss it prior to the May SCT meeting, because of the short timeline for this decision. We are also going to start a McNary analysis, Hevlin said, although the timeline is unknown at this time.

5. Review Multi-Year CRFM Spreadsheet, FY'05 CRFM Spreadsheet.

John Kranda distributed the most recent version of the multi-year CRFM measures worksheet, dated April 23. This topic was not discussed at today's meeting, however; it was agreed to discuss the spreadsheet in more detail at the next meeting, although Hevlin observed that the previous RSW discussion is the central question in the SCT's FY'05 prioritization efforts.

6. Next SCT Meeting Date.

The next System Configuration Team meeting was set for 1:30 Wednesday, May 26. Meeting summary prepared by Jeff Kuechle.